Levi Rejects Request For a New Ford Probe

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Attorney General Edward H. Levi yesterday rejected a request for a new probe of allegations that President Ford lied about his role in helping to block a 1972 congressional investigation of the Watergate break-in.

The investigation had been sought by Reps. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) and John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) following charges made last week by former White House counsel John W. Dean III. Dean's allegations since have become an issue in the presidential campaign.

However, Levi said he had concluded "There is no credible evidence, new or old, making appropriate the initiation of a further investigation." Accordingly, he added, the Justice Department "declines to conduct a further, formal investigation of its own or to request the (Watergate) special prosecutor to conduct a further investigation."

Levi's statement appeared to foreclose any possibility of further official action relating to Dean's charges. In a TV interview, Dean said that former President Nixon had directed Richard Cook, then a member of the White House congressional liaison staff, to talk with Ford in 1972 about halting a proposed Watergate inquiry by the House Banking Committee.

Ford then was the minority leader in the House. Following intensive Republican lobbying, the committee voted against holding Watergate hearings; but Ford, in his 1974 vice presidential confirmation hearings, denied that the Nixon White House had asked him to fight off a committee investigation.

At a White House press conference yesterday, Ford repeated that, according to his "best recollection," he had acted on his own initiative on 1972.

It was his first direct reply to the charges since they were raised anew by Dean. When he was asked about them last week, the President only referred to his 1973 confirmation hearings before the House Judiciary Committee and Senate Rules Committee and said:

"I will give you exactly the same answer I gave to the House committee two committees, and I think that is satisfactory answer. I am not going to pass judgment on what Mr. Dean now matter was fully investigated by those allergist."

In the week since, however, questions have persisted about Ford's 1972 contacts with Cook and with such other Nixon White House staffers as John D. Ehrlichman, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and Cook's boss, William Timmons.

When the question was raised again at yesterdays press conference, Ford gave this reply:

"As I recall my testimony before one—maybe both committees—I said I had never been contacted by President Nixon, by Mr. Ehrlichman, by Mr. Haldeman or by Mr. Dean, and I with Mr. Timmons, who was the head of the legislative liaison office.

"But, to the best of my recollection, neither he nor anybody in his office asked me to take a hand in the committee action. That was my testimony in 1973; it is my testimony, or my answer to your question today."

Levi, in his statement, said that he had decided against a probe after a Justice Department review of previous testimony about the incident, the transcript of Dean's TV remarks, the subsequent denials by Cook and Timmons and a check with former Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.